# British Birds

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(with five plates)

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Three Shillings

September 1960

# British Birds

AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY JOURNAL

*Edited by*
P. A. D. Hollom E. M. Nicholson
I. J. Ferguson-Lees Stanley Cramp
*Photographic Editor:* Eric Hosking
*Hon. Editors:* W. B. Alexander N. F. Ticehurst
*Editorial Address:* 30 St. Leonard's Avenue, Bedford

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## Indexes and Binding

This issue includes a short index of the English names of birds in volume 53, and the comprehensive index will be published in the New Year, at a cost of five shillings. Those who do not wish to have the full index will be able to send in their issues for binding from 1st January onwards. Those who have ordered the full index are asked *not* to send in their issues for binding until they receive it, which will probably be in February. The title page and list of illustrations are published with this issue and are bound round the main text so that they are not damaged as they might be if inserted loose; the binders can detach these and also the colour plate and put them at the beginning of the volume. The cost of binding is now sixteen shillings per volume (earlier volumes can also be bound at this rate). All issues for binding should be sent to British Birds (Binding), 5 Warwick Court, London, W.C.1.

PLATE 50. Female Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*), Bulgaria, June 1960. This shows the pattern of grey and white (pinker on the breast) with black mask, wings and tail. Note the stubby bill, relative lengths of tail and wings, black forehead, largely grey scapulars and lack of white superciliary (pages 398 to 400). In adult plumage the sexes are rather similar in appearance, but the female has browner-black mask and wings and a grey-speckled forehead (*photo: Eric Hosking*)

British Birds

VOL. 53 NO. 9
SEPTEMBER 1960

# Nearctic birds in Great Britain and Ireland in autumn 1958

*By Kenneth Williamson*
Migration Research Officer, B.T.O.
*and I. J. Ferguson-Lees*

IN THE LATER AUTUMN of 1958 an unusually varied selection of vagrant birds from across the Atlantic appeared in Great Britain and Ireland. The species involved included ones with normal distributions ranging from western Greenland and arctic Canada south to the eastern United States and Florida. Shorebirds and waterfowl, including six or seven species of North American waders, made up the bulk of the records as usual, but other groups were also involved, among them three purely American Passerines. In fact, the number and variety of the species made the autumn one of the most interesting on record for Nearctic birds. At the same time the main occurrences tended to group themselves into several more or less well-defined phases, largely in the second half of the period, from mid-September onwards; indeed, until then it had been an exceptionally poor time for American birds over here, with one or two Lesser Yellowlegs providing the only observations. These considerations made us think that it might be worth examining the records against the contemporary meteorological situation in eastern and arctic North America and over the North Atlantic Ocean. It is the purpose of this paper to set out our results while at the same time grouping the records together in one place for easy reference.

This analysis was actually prepared in draft form at the beginning of 1959, but it was decided to delay publication until the observations had been passed by the Rarity Records Committee then in the process of formation. Most of the occurrences summarised below appeared

in the first report of that Committee (*Brit. Birds,* 53: 153-173)—or in one case will appear among the additions for 1958 accompanying the 1959 report which is being published in the next issue of this journal. The only exceptions are the Baltimore Oriole, the Sabine's Gulls and the phalaropes. The final acceptance of the first of these still awaits the results of certain enquiries and Sabine's Gull was not added to the species covered by the Rarity Records Committee until 1959 (*Brit. Birds,* 53: 95); the phalaropes are not, of course, the concern of the Committee at all. In the systematic list which follows, therefore, the details have been kept to the barest minimum and the names of observers are given only in the cases of these species not already published in this journal. In all, occurrences of 17 species are summarised here. Of these, 14 were almost certainly of Nearctic origin, although the breeding ranges of the Snow Goose, Long-billed Dowitcher and Pectoral Sandpiper extend into north-eastern Siberia. The other three—the two phalaropes and Sabine's Gull—breed in (mainly arctic) Europe and Asia as well, but we have included them because consideration of the pattern of the autumn as a whole leads us to believe that some at least of the observations refer to birds from Greenland or arctic Canada. One other record that should perhaps also be mentioned is the Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*) which was picked up freshly dead near Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, on 17th October 1958 (*Brit. Birds,* 53: 32): unfortunately subspecific identification of the remains was not possible, but in view of the date and the prevailing picture of the autumn it is not unlikely that it was of the Caribbean race *recognita* rather than of the typical Afro-Asian form.

We are most grateful to all the people who have written to us about their records and should particularly like to acknowledge the help of Major R. F. Ruttledge. A brief note in *Bird Migration* (1: 28) led to correspondence with Dr. I. C. T. Nisbet (then at Cambridge, Massachusetts) and Aaron M. Bagg (of Dover, Massachusetts) and we were very glad to have the views of these observers from across the Atlantic; attention must also be drawn now to the paper by Nisbet (1959) on the subject of North American waders in Great Britain and Ireland. R. A. French (of Rothamsted Experimental Station, Harpenden, Hertfordshire) also kindly gave us information on transatlantic movements of Lepidoptera and we thank him for permission to mention one of the records brought to his notice.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

In this list the number of records is given in parentheses after each bird's name. These are then itemised in chronological order, with the date first in bold type, so that cross-reference to the section on WEATHER CORRELATION is made easy.

**Green-winged Teal** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) (2)

**26th October and 2nd November,** Downpatrick Marshes (Co. Down), ♂ showing the characters of this race. **23rd November,** Akeagh Lough (Co. Kerry), ♂ ditto.

**American Wigeon** (*Anas americana*) (1)

**9th October,** Beauly Firth (Inverness-shire), immature ♂.

**Surf Scoter** (*Melanitta perspicillata*) (1)

**3rd November-20th December,** North Bull (Co. Dublin), immature.

**Snow Goose** (*Anser caerulescens*) (6 records involving 11 birds)

**19th October-first week December,** near Southport (Lancashire), adult blue phase. **22nd October-late November,** Loch of Strathbeg (Aberdeenshire), three white phase. **6th November,** Appin (Argyll), one white phase. **16th and 18th November,** Kingoodie/Invergowrie Bay (Perthshire), one white phase. **30th November,** near South Queensferry (West Lothian), four white phase. **8th December through the winter,** South and North Slobs (Co. Wexford), one white phase.

**American Purple Gallinule** (*Porphyrula martinica*) (1)

**7th November** (died on 9th), Hugh Town, St. Mary's (Isles of Scilly), immature.

**Killdeer** (*Charadrius vociferus*) (1)

**20th November-2nd December,** near Blennerville (Co. Kerry), one.

**Short-billed or Long-billed Dowitcher** (*Limnodromus griseus* or *scolopaceus*) (3)

**20th and 30th September,** Hule Moss (Berwickshire), one. **19th October-1st November,** Kilbarrack (Co. Dublin), one. **3rd December,** Blennerville (Co. Kerry), one.

In none of these cases were sufficient details noted for it to be decided which species of dowitcher was involved.

**Lesser Yellowlegs** (*Tringa flavipes*) (3)

**10th August,** Exe Estuary (Devon), one. **2nd September,** Kingsbridge Estuary (Devon), one. **25th September,** Havergate Island (Suffolk), one.

**White-rumped Sandpiper** (*Calidris fuscicollis*) (4)

**9th October,** Belfast Lough (Co. Antrim), one. **12th October,** Tyninghame Estuary (East Lothian), one. **12th-22nd October,** Wembury Point (Devon), one. **22nd October,** Inch, Castlemaine Harbour (Co. Kerry), one.

Note the closeness of the dates of these four occurrences.

**Pectoral Sandpiper** (*Calidris melanotos*) (6 records probably involving only 5 birds)

**20th-28th September,** Perry Oaks sewage-farm (Middlesex), one. **21st September,** Akeagh Lough (Co. Kerry), one. **22nd September and following days,** Ponsandene, Penzance (Cornwall), one. **23rd September-11th October,** Skokholm

(Pembrokeshire), immature. **27th September,** North Slob (Co. Wexford), one. **27th-30th September,** Marazion Marsh (Cornwall), one, considered to have been the same individual as that at Ponsandene from the 22nd.

Note that the first dates of all these birds fall within a period of eight days. The Skokholm bird was caught in a single-shelf mist-net on 26th September and weighed 103.5 gm.

### Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*) (1)

**18th September,** Fair Isle, one.

### Grey and Red-necked Phalaropes (*Phalaropus fulicarius* and *lobatus*)

(at least 44 records involving over 90 Grey and some 14 Red-necked) These two species are dealt with together, and separated as G and R, because of the several indeterminate records which may refer to the one or the other.

**14th September,** Scaling Dam, Teesmouth (Yorkshire), one R (D. G. Bell, P. J. Stead *et al.*). **17th September,** Marazion Marsh (Cornwall), one G (Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Meares). **19th September,** St. Mary's (Isles of Scilly), one probably R (M. E. French). **20th September,** Abbotsbury (Dorset), 14 G seen, six picked up dead (F. Lexster). **22nd September,** St. Ives Island (Cornwall), five G, one R (N. R. Phillips). **23rd September,** St. Mary's (Isles of Scilly), two G, one dead (R. Symons). **24th September,** St. Ives Island (Cornwall), one R (N. R. Phillips) **24th September,** Tresco (Isles of Scilly), one G (E. A. Grove). **24th September,** Great Saltee (Co. Wexford), one G (per Major R. F. Ruttledge). **24th September,** Berrow Sands (Somerset), one G (E. G. Holt). **24th September,** Titchfield Haven (Hampshire), one G (S. L. White). **24th-25th September,** King George V Reservoir (Essex), one G (A. B. Phillips). **24th September-12th October,** King George VI Reservoir (Middlesex), one G (*London Bird Report 1958*). **25th September,** St. Ives Island (Cornwall), five or six G (N. R. Phillips). **26th September-1st October,** Poole Harbour (Dorset), one G (Mrs. K. Adams *et al.*). **28th September-6th October,** Bardney (Lincolnshire), one R (C. T. Beverley, Mrs. L. Cave, A. D. Townsend *et al.*). **About a week to 5th October,** Freshwater Bay (Isle of Wight), four G (J. Stafford, J. M. Walton). **4th October,** Lyme Regis Cobb (Dorset), one G (J. F. Cancellor). **5th October,** Constantine Beach (Cornwall), one G (H. P. O. Cleave, T. J. Willcocks). **5th October,** St. Ives Island (Cornwall), one G (N. R. Phillips). **5th October,** Braunton Pill (Devon), one G (A. J. Vickery). **5th October,** Chew Valley Reservoir (Somerset), one G (R. F. Wills). **5th October,** Portland Bill (Dorset), nine and one probably G, four probably R (Portland Bird Observatory). **5th October,** Hengistbury Head (Hampshire), one probably G F. R. Clafton). **6th October,** Lodmoor (Dorset), one G (Miss M. D. Crosby). **6th October,** Shoreham (Sussex), one G (B. A. E. Marr). **8th October,** off St. Agnes (Isles of Scilly), 15+ G (*per* J. L. F. Parslow). **9th-11th October,** Stanpit Marshes (Hampshire), two G, one killed on 11th (E. Cohen, J. Wright). **9th-12th October,** Epsom sewage-farm (Surrey), one G (M. J. Carter, K. D. Edwards *et al.*). **12th October-1st November,** Powderham (Devon), one G (R. F. Moore, R. G. Adams, F. R. Smith *et al.*). **12th and 18th October,** Queen Mary Reservoir (Middlesex), one G (*London Bird Report 1958*). **12th October,** St. Ives Island (Cornwall), two R (N. R. Phillips). **19th October,** St. Ives Island (Cornwall), one G (N. R. Phillips). **19th-23rd October,** Par Beach (Cornwall), one G (C. J. Stevens). **26th October,** Dibden (Hampshire), two R (T. E. Brice, Dr. C. Suffern). **"October",** St. Mary's (Isles of Scilly), "several" G (P. Z. Mackenzie). **"October/November",** Tollesbury

(Essex), one indeterminate (F. Foakes). **5th November,** Westward Ho! (Devon), one R (B. G. Lampard-Vachell). **14th November-5th December,** Shoreham (Sussex), one G (J. M. Twort *et al.*). **22nd November,** Slough (Buckinghamshire), one G (R. J. Johns). **22nd November,** Hanningfield Reservoir (Essex), one G (J. N. Lyster). **13th December,** South Gare, Teesmouth (Yorkshire), one probably G (J. Nicholson).

The above list may well not be quite complete, though as many county reports as possible have been checked for records. The total number of phalaropes observed in 1958 was not extraordinary—in fact, it was rather less than in 1957 (*cf. Brit. Birds,* 52: 33-42) and considerably less than in 1959 when at least 350 were recorded in one big flock at St. Agnes, Isles of Scilly (*Brit. Birds,* 53: 403). Nevertheless, with these exceptions, the total was probably more than in any other year since 1950 and the records provide an interesting background to those of the purely Nearctic species. It will be noted that all but a handful occurred in the 23-day period from 20th September to 12th October.

### Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) (6 records involving 7 birds)

**20th August,** Kinnegar (Co. Down), adult (T. Ennis, R. McKay, M. Grey). **24th September,** from R.M.V. *Scillonian* close to Isles of Scilly, adult (P. R. Colston *et al.*). **25th September,** St. Ives Island (Cornwall), two (N. R. Phillips). **28th September,** Lundy (Devon), immature (W. B. Workman *et al.*). **30th September,** Porthkidney Beach (Cornwall), adult (Rev. J. E. Beckerlegge). **4th October,** from R.M.V. *Scillonian* close to Penzance (Cornwall), immature (B. S. Milne).

Note that, with the exception of the first, all these observations fall within the peak period for the phalaropes.

### Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Hylocichla minima*) (1)

**29th October,** Fair Isle, first-winter bird.

This bird was trapped and weighed 27.8 gm. It is only the second British and third European record. One was trapped at Fair Isle in October 1953 (*Brit. Birds,* 47: 266-269) and there was one at the Isle of Elba, Italy, in November 1901.

### Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) (1)

**30th September-12th October,** St. Agnes (Isles of Scilly), one.

This bird was trapped but unfortunately could not be weighed. It is the first British and only the second European record. One occurred at Ushant, France, in September 1956.

### Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) (1)

**2nd-10th October,** Lundy (Devon), immature female (W. B. Workman *et al.*).

This bird was trapped on 2nd October and at 27 gm. its weight showed a loss of about 25-30% on the normal for the season. If

finally accepted, it will be the first British record. One occurred in Shetland in September 1890 (see *Brit. Birds,* 48: 13), but has never been accepted because of the frequency with which the species was imported at that time.

## WEATHER CORRELATION

*August 10th and September 2nd*

There were westerlies spanning the North Atlantic throughout early August, and a depression which left the St. Lawrence on the 5th, travelling eastwards, deepened until the 7th, when the winds on its southern periphery were as strong as Beaufort forces 8-9. The centre held a course between the parallels of 50°-60°N, so that only Ireland and the West Country were exposed to the westerly airstream. There was another period of similar cyclonic disturbance in the Atlantic, with offshore winds and frontal developments in the Nova Scotia and St. Lawrence areas, near the close of the month. It is quite possible, therefore, that the Lesser Yellowlegs recorded in Devon on 10th August and 2nd September were two different birds.

*September 18th-25th*

On 16th-17th September most of the North Atlantic was under the influence of a vast and very deep cyclonic system with its centre moving towards the entrance to Denmark Strait at 60°N. It had approached this position through the western half of the ocean, the eastern half meanwhile being embraced by a ridge of the Azores high, which, however, had moved to Scandinavia by the 18th. Before this date, Fair Isle was within the high pressure zone with the wind somewhat east of south, and it is extremely doubtful if any bird adrift in the Atlantic could have made a landfall there or elsewhere in the British Isles.

It does not seem likely that any of the birds of this period (except perhaps the Buff-breasted Sandpiper) could have been displaced from the NE States south of the St. Lawrence, and certainly the later arrivals (Pectoral Sandpipers and phalaropes) are more likely to have originated along the Labrador coast or in Davis Strait, reaching the ocean in the NW airstream on the western flank of the depression. This low was slow-moving, and the NW-W airstream was maintained during the 20th-21st. It is unlikely that any of the arrivals in this phase took place after the 23rd, except for Sabine's Gulls and phalaropes already well out at sea, and on the 22nd-23rd the meteorological indications are that such arrivals would be restricted by the airstream to southern Ireland and the West Country. The NW cyclonic airstream was confined to the eastern side of the Atlantic on the 24th, there being a depression to the north of the British Isles.

*September 28th-October 2nd*

The weather was not again conducive to Atlantic crossings until 27th September. The Bermuda high was strongly influencing the eastern States during the 24th-25th, and on the latter date a low moved across north-east Canada from Hudson's Bay, its fronts sweeping across the St. Lawrence Estuary and New England with moderate to fresh westerly winds in its warm sector. Britain at the time was covered by a high, which, however, passed to the Continent as the depression expanded off southern Greenland, so that by the 28th there were westerlies across the whole reach of the North Atlantic with a direct cyclonic airstream blowing between Davis Strait and the British Isles. This, which may well have brought the Sabine's Gulls, remained effective on the 29th, when a small but vigorous depression off Newfoundland came into the picture, having previously moved north with hurricane intensity along the American east coast.

The main depression then moved close to Ireland, and the Newfoundland low took a NE course to a position south of Cape Farewell, so that below the two depressions westerly winds spanned the Atlantic, with offshore breezes in the St. Lawrence Estuary and Newfoundland. This change coincided with the appearance of two Passerine migrants (Northern Waterthrush and Baltimore Oriole) at the south-western bird observatories of St. Agnes and Lundy: with a low centred over Ireland on the 30th and 1st, only south-west England and southern Ireland was exposed to the westerly airstream.

Concerning the events of this period, I. C. T. Nisbet (*in litt.*, 18.i.59) writes: "The Northern Waterthrush seems to have got mixed up in the hurricane which hit the North Carolina coast on 27th September. This was bringing rain to the whole eastern seaboard from the Gulf of St. Lawrence south during the night of the 27th-28th, but the weather cleared for the next night and the 29th was a big day all the way down the coast. Large migration on the coast usually coincides with NW winds, and records there are normally a good indication of when birds are being blown offshore. My guess would be that the Waterthrush left Nova Scotia or northern Maine on the evening of the 28th while the wind was still strong from the NW, wandered too far east and got caught in the westerly winds on the south side of the remains of the hurricane. The Baltimore Oriole is rather more interesting. If it could have left on the 29th-30th there was still an offshore wind in Newfoundland and the low that developed from the hurricane between Greenland and Iceland to take it on from there. On the other hand, the bird's weight suggests that it was newly-arrived on 2nd October, and in any case the 29th is much too late for an intelligent Baltimore Oriole to be in Newfoundland. It looks much more likely that it left from the middle part of the Atlantic

coast (somewhere between Virginia and Massachusetts) on the evening of the 30th, and started off north-east in the SW wind ahead of an advancing cold front." Evidence for such movements, bringing Baltimore Orioles and other species north-eastwards up the Atlantic coast of North America, has since been given in a paper by Baird, Bagg, Nisbet and Robbins (1959).

As a postscript to the events of this period, it is worthy of note that the capture of a North American moth, *Phytometra biloba*, at Torquay, Devon, on 1st October, was reported to R. A. French of the Rothamsted Experimental Station. This moth is fairly closely related to the Silver Y (*Plusia gamma*). There is one previous record of its being taken in Britain and that was at Aberystwyth, Cardiganshire, on 19th July 1954, following a period when a wind-borne Atlantic crossing was possible. One might comment that creatures of such small size would experience no difficulty in remaining airborne for a very long period in a region of atmospheric convergence such as is provided by a cyclonic system.

*October 4th-5th and 7th-11th*

Similar cyclonic conditions to those of 28th-29th September, with winds attaining forces 8-9 over parts of the Atlantic, and the airstream flowing to Britain from Davis Strait, continued intermittently during the early part of October. These conditions appear to have caught a part of the West Greenland phalarope population *en route* to its wintering area. The White-rumped Sandpipers which arrived in the later phase seem likely to have been carried eastwards when on migration from breeding-grounds in NW Greenland or the east Canadian Arctic.

*October 13th-15th and 18th-20th*

With a low moving from Denmark Strait across Iceland towards the Norwegian coast, there was a westerly airstream between Labrador-Newfoundland and the British Isles from late on 13th October to the 15th. Davis Strait and much of the east Canadian Arctic enjoyed col weather on 17th-18th October, with cyclonic westerlies over most of the Atlantic extending to Iceland on the 17th, but embracing Ireland and northern Britain on the 18th and the whole country next day. A vigorous depression situated between Newfoundland and Cape Farewell reimposed an ocean-wide westerly airstream from Nova Scotia to Europe on the 19th-20th. Thereafter conditions do not appear to have been propitious for an Atlantic crossing until the 28th-29th, when they were similar to those of 13th-15th October.

Aaron M. Bagg (*in litt.*, 21.i.59) and I. C. T. Nisbet have expressed the view that the Gray-cheeked Thrush which was trapped at Fair Isle on 29th October is most unlikely to have crossed in the westerly

weather at that time, when offshore winds on the American side were confined to Labrador and Newfoundland. Bagg points out that Griscom and Snyder (1955) give the autumn migration period for this species as 10th September-9th October (with 22nd October 1952 as an exception), while Palmer (1949) gives 11th September and 24th October as extreme dates. The weight of the Fair Isle example when trapped suggests that it probably was not newly-arrived in Britain on 29th October: at 27.8 gm. (1205 hours GMT) it was not greatly below the average of 33.4 gm. given by J. Baird of the Norman Bird Sanctuary, Rhode Island (*in litt.*, July 1960), for fall migrants in eastern North America, and had made a better recovery than the previous Fair Isle example of 6th October 1953 (Davis 1959). Too little is known about the rate of recuperation of transatlantic vagrants to permit of speculation, but it is probable that the bird in 1958 had been "off-passage" in Shetland for several days.

*November 3rd-7th*

A depression, moving north-eastwards along the American coast on the 3rd, passed out to sea south of Newfoundland on the 4th. During the period there were offshore breezes along the eastern coastline of the United States as far south as Florida, with frontal activity on the 3rd and mist and drizzle along most of the reach on the 5th-6th. A ridge, extending north to Newfoundland on the 5th, developed closed isobars next day, and the anticyclone expanded to cover most of mid-Atlantic on the 7th. With low pressure active to the north in Davis Strait and the Iceland region, there was a complementary westerly airstream between Newfoundland and south-west Britain and Ireland at forces 4-6; but even allowing for the offshore breezes and poor visibility in the south-eastern United States on the 4th-5th it is extremely difficult to see how the Purple Gallinule could have got into this airstream unless first carried as a vagrant far north of its normal range, perhaps by the northwards-travelling low of the 3rd-4th. However, this point is discussed by Nisbet (1960).

Quite independently, in the course of a study of the occurrence of some western North American birds in Bermuda on 2nd-3rd November and after, Aaron M. Bagg has suggested that the Purple Gallinule may well have got caught up in this depression, which moved from the Gulf of Mexico (31st October) through northern Florida (1st November) and Cape Hatteras (2nd) to Nantucket in Massachusetts (3rd) before passing out to sea.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

(1) A systematic list of the unusually large number of records of Nearctic species in Great Britain and Ireland during the autumn of 1958 is given on pages 370-374.

and the occurrences are examined in the light of the North Atlantic weather conditions at that time. In all, 17 species are dealt with. Fourteen of these are truly Nearctic with normal distributions ranging from western Greenland to Florida, and there were no less than 32 records (involving some 36 individuals) in this category. The other three species are Holarctic ones and the 50-odd records involving about 110 individuals are included because some at least of the observations clearly refer to birds from Greenland or arctic Canada.

(2) The most frequent pressure-pattern which gave rise to Atlantic crossings by American waders (particularly Pectoral and White-rumped Sandpipers), and also Grey Phalaropes and Sabine's Gulls, showed a cyclonic NW wind over Labrador and Davis Strait, occasionally extending to West Greenland, backing westerly in mid-Atlantic on the periphery of vigorous depressions in the neighbourhood of Denmark Strait.

(3) A few of the depressions reaching the North Atlantic storm-track came down from the Hudson's Bay region of Arctic Canada, sweeping across the St. Lawrence waterway and Newfoundland to pursue a NE course. Offshore westerly winds and poor visibility at the fronts, causing drift, are associated with these depressions.

(4) Other depressions, sometimes at hurricane intensity in their early stages, take a similar path into the Atlantic after travelling NE along the eastern coast of the United States, from as far south as Florida. In such cases, birds are often displaced northwards to reach New England and Nova Scotia as vagrants, and there is a risk of drift out to sea. The appearance of two Passerines (Northern Waterthrush and Baltimore Oriole) in SW England followed this pattern, also the occurrence in the Isles of Scilly of an American Purple Gallinule.

(5) A down-wind directed flight is strongly indicated in the sometimes very local grouping of the arrivals, the fall being confined to that part of the country which is exposed to the westerly airstream.

(6) A North American moth, *Phytometra biloba*, was captured in the same geographical area as the two American Passerines, and at the same time.

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# Autumn "drift-migration" on the English east coast

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(*Concluded from page 352*)

## TIME OF DAY OF ARRIVALS

The times at which migrants actually arrived were occasionally recorded, all of the following instances referring to typical Continental species such as Pied Flycatchers. On 12th September 1949 there were few migrants at Gibraltar Point before 1800 hours and there was then an influx (Smith *et al.* 1950). On 24th August 1951 there were very few at Spurn at 0700 hours and large numbers twelve hours later, but watch could not be kept in between (*per* R. Chislett). On 1st October 1951 the huge arrival of Robins occurred from noon onwards (Daukes 1952, Smith and Cornwallis 1952, Jenkins 1953). On 21st August 1954 there was a sudden influx at Gibraltar Point at 1100 hours and on the opposite side of the Wash an hour later (Cornwallis 1955, Nisbet 1955). At Cley on 24th September 1955 there was a marked arrival from the sea in the afternoon, against a light south-westerly wind (*per* R. A. Richardson). At Holme in north-west Norfolk many migrants were already present by 1400 hours on 2nd September 1956, and many more continued to arrive until 1800 hours, while most of a big arrival there a week later appeared during the afternoon (Wallace and Vine 1957). Finally, on 6th September 1959 an increase was obvious at Spurn by late afternoon (R. Chislett *in litt.*). Hence some big arrivals started and others continued after midday, but both Chislett and R. K. Cornwallis (*in litt.*) informed me that Continental migrants were often present already in the early morning and that the less frequent afternoon arrivals were singled out for publication.

The migratory impulse of a small Passerine night-migrant is probably weakest in the afternoon, especially if it has been flying since the previous evening. Hence it is possible that the proportion of arriving migrants actually alighting on the coast is higher in the afternoon than in the first hours of daylight. North Norfolk and east Yorkshire are about 400 miles from south Norway, a distance which a warbler might fly in 14 hours in still air. Therefore small birds leaving Norway soon after dark should have reached the English coast by the early morning with a following north-easterly wind, and well before noon with a south-easterly cross-wind. Arrivals later in the day

might occur for two distinct reasons, either if the sea-crossing were slowed down or if migrants continued to leave Scandinavia until the early morning.

The factor most likely to retard the sea-crossing is a head-wind. Hence it may be significant that one big and four moderate arrivals included in Table IV, and three other moderate arrivals discussed in Appendix B, occurred with a nearly opposed wind between SSE and south in the southern North Sea, while six other moderate arrivals discussed in Appendix B took place with a south-westerly wind in the southern North Sea. On one of the latter occasions migrants were actually recorded coming off the sea at Cley during the afternoon, as just mentioned. Another retarding factor might be full overcast over the sea at night, since radar has shown that migrants are disoriented in fog; and, if they then fly at random until they can again see to navigate (perhaps only with the appearance of the sun next morning), they might reach England several hours later than usual.

The second possibility is that, having started in the interior of Scandinavia at dusk, night-migrants might sometimes continue putting out to sea from southern Norway until the early morning, in which case the latest to leave would not reach England until the afternoon. I might add that radar has shown that in September night-migrants not infrequently continue putting out to sea SSE from East Anglia until the early morning, though the conditions in which this happens have not yet been studied. As already mentioned, radar has also demonstrated that in East Anglia in September there are at least moderate departures nearly every night, and that here the traditional picture of autumn migration proceeding by big rushes in anticyclones, with long intervals in disturbed weather with hardly any movement, is much exaggerated. But the pattern of Continental arrivals at the observatories fits much better with this traditional view, since all save one of the big arrivals and most of the moderate ones occurred with anticyclonic weather in southern Scandinavia. This might be explicable if seaward departures from Norway tended to continue into the early morning to a greater extent in anticyclonic than disturbed weather; it would then be primarily in anticyclonic weather that migrants reached the English east coast in the afternoon, and so had a strong tendency to alight instead of continuing inland. This idea is entirely speculative, but seems worth further study.

It may be added that two British-type movements in westerly weather at Gibraltar Point, primarily of Whitethroats and Willow Warblers, were both confined to the early morning, one reaching its peak at 0730 and both being over by 0900 hours (Smith *et al.* 1950 for 7th September 1949, Smith and Cornwallis 1952 for 1st September 1951).

### VARIATIONS BETWEEN THE THREE OBSERVATORIES

Big or moderate Continental arrivals at one observatory were sometimes, but far from always, accompanied by arrivals of similar size at the others. Omitting British-type departures, there were in the main period studied here 15 days on which at least a hundred birds arrived at one observatory. On six of these days at least a hundred birds also arrived at each of the other observatories, but on three more of these days the number of arrivals at one observatory was six or seven times as great as at an adjacent one, and on five others it was more than ten times as great. (On the remaining day comparisons were impossible, as only one observatory was manned.) Again, there were 19 further days on which 50-99 birds arrived at one observatory. On six of them this number was similar to that at adjacent observatories, being at most three times as large, and on seven other days it was only between four and eight times as large, but on two days it was respectively 14 and 17 times as large as at an adjacent observatory, and on four others only a single arrival, or none, was recorded at one of the other observatories. The local variations were therefore very large, and similar examples could have been cited from the days on which at most 20-49 birds arrived at one of these three observatories on the east coast.

Big differences on the same day between adjacent observatories were so frequent that they were clearly genuine, and were not due, for instance, to faulty counting. Their cause cannot lie either with the weather influencing departures from Scandinavia on the previous night, or, usually at least, with the wind-conditions influencing drift in the North Sea; for such factors should affect all three observatories to a similar extent, except on the presumably rare occasions when the birds reaching, respectively, south Yorkshire and north Norfolk meet different wind-conditions in the North Sea. Their cause must normally lie with purely local weather factors in the neighbourhood of each observatory influencing the number of arriving migrants that alight there instead of passing inland. It might perhaps need only a slight difference in the local weather to induce a hundred instead of ten migrants to alight at the coast, especially if this were only a small fraction of the number passing overhead. However, if this argument is sound, it follows that purely local factors of this nature were of paramount importance in at least half the big and moderate arrivals under consideration, *i.e.* in all those in which there were big local differences in the number of arrivals on the same day; further, they could also have been of paramount importance on other days on which, by chance, the local factors influencing descent at the coast were similar at adjacent observatories.

## THE RARITIES

Most rare species were much too infrequent for the type of analysis used in this paper, but it is important to investigate them in so far as possible, since Williamson (especially 1959) based much of his case for down-wind drift on the eastern rarities. He particularly studied the Red-breasted Flycatcher, and postulated that the Barred Warbler and many Icterine Warblers and Bluethroats came in the same category. The Bluethroat, however, would seem to be in a different class, since it breeds in the far north and migrates south-west in autumn, whereas the other three species breed mainly in eastern Europe south of Fenno-Scandia (into which the Icterine and to a lesser extent the other two just extend) and migrate south-east in autumn. Rudebeck (1956) argued that a small proportion of Red-breasted Flycatchers and Barred Warblers (also Yellow-browed Warblers) must migrate south-west, at times with westerly winds (*cf.* Otterlind 1944, Christensen 1952). Williamson, on the other hand, postulated that the individuals of these species reaching Britain are juveniles on a dispersal before their autumn migration.

The occurrences of these species at the three observatories have been analysed in Table VIII. Most were single birds, and some of them perhaps arrived a day or two before they were first recorded, either because they were overlooked, or because they landed a few miles away and later moved into the observatory area, or because they descended at the coast on a redetermined departure from England. (For instance, on two occasions a Bluethroat was first recorded in what was, for this species, unusual weather, on the day after other Bluethroats had appeared in typical weather.) But the watch for rarities is so close that most of them probably arrived on the day that they were first seen.

Also, such possible objections should apply equally to all four species, but Table VIII reveals a marked difference between the Bluethroat and the others. Thus nearly half the Bluethroats but only one-tenth of the Barred Warblers came on the few days with big arrivals of other Continental migrants; two-thirds of the Bluethroats but only one-seventh of the Barred Warblers came in anticyclonic weather with easterly winds throughout the North Sea; and Bluethroats rarely but Barred Warblers fairly often arrived with north-westerly winds. In these respects the Red-breasted Flycatcher, and less certainly the Icterine, resembled the Barred Warbler and not the Bluethroat. Finally, all four species were rare with south-westerly winds, and their arrivals were apparently irrespective of the presence or absence of fog or total cloud at either end of the North Sea.

From Table VIII it may safely be concluded that Bluethroats

TABLE VIII—ARRIVALS OF FOUR RARER SPECIES AT THREE BIRD OBSERVATORIES ON THE EAST COAST OF ENGLAND, 20TH AUGUST-10TH OCTOBER 1949-1959

| | *Number of birds arriving in conditions of each type* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) (64) | Barred Warbler (*Sylvia nisoria*) (51) | Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa parva*) (39) | Icterine Warbler (*Hippolais icterina*) (19) |
| *Size of accompanying arrival* | | | | |
| Big | 29 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| Moderate | 10 | 3 | 6 | 5 |
| Small | 8 | 18 | 14 | 5 |
| Negligible | 17 | 25 | 14 | 6 |
| *Weather situation* | | | | |
| Settled with E winds | 42 | 7 | 10 | 5 |
| Other types of settled | 8 | 23 | 20 | 6 |
| Transitional | 9 | 10 | 6 | 6 |
| Disturbed with W winds | 2 | 7 | 1 | 2 |
| Other types of disturbed | 3 | 4 | 2 | — |
| *Wind in north-eastern North Sea* | | | | |
| N, NE or light variable | 23 | 21 | 18 | 7 |
| E or SE | 34 | 10 | 11 | 5 |
| S or SW | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| W or NW | 4 | 16 | 8 | 6 |
| *Wind in southern North Sea* | | | | |
| N or NE | 12 | 16 | 9 | 6 |
| E or SE | 39 | 14 | 22 | 8 |
| S or SW | 7 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| W or NW | 6 | 18 | 5 | 4 |
| *Full overcast in north-eastern North Sea* | | | | |
| Present | 35 | 29 | 26 | 14 |
| Not recorded | 29 | 22 | 13 | 5 |
| *Full overcast in southern North Sea* | | | | |
| Present | 29 | 17 | 22 | 6 |
| Not recorded | 35 | 34 | 17 | 13 |

reached eastern England in autumn in the same conditions as the main Continental arrivals studied in this paper. It is particularly interesting that some Bluethroats came with the few big arrivals that occurred in

less typical weather, notably on 22nd August 1954, 20th September 1957 and 6th September 1959. Hence the weather factors affecting the Bluethroats can be taken to be the same as for the main Continental arrivals and need not be set out separately; this means that there is no need to suppose that Bluethroats usually came down-wind or were significantly affected by full overcast.

It may also be concluded from Table VIII that the appearances of Barred Warblers and Red-breasted Flycatchers were affected by at least partly different factors from the main Continental arrivals. Hence these species should not be used as "markers" of the main arrivals. This difference may also be taken to favour the view of Williamson (1959), as against that of Rudebeck (1956), that in the Barred Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher a juvenile dispersal, not a true south-westward migration, is involved, particularly as all identified British individuals of these species in autumn have been young birds. Further, on Fair Isle the Bluethroat is sparse but regular in both autumn and spring, whereas the Barred Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher are sparse but regular in autumn and absent in spring, again suggesting that their autumn appearances may be abnormal. On the other hand, Table VIII provides no support for Williamson's view that these two species reach England by down-wind "drift". Provided that at least most of the recorded dates of arrival can be trusted, arrivals with north-westerly winds were not infrequent. It is true that many more Barred Warblers and Red-breasted Flycatchers came with easterly winds than would be expected if their arrivals had been independent of wind-direction, but the proportion coming with easterly winds was markedly lower than for the common Continental migrants and for the Bluethroat. Further, there was apparently no correlation between their occurrences and the presence of fog or total cloud round the North Sea. I therefore see no reason to postulate that either the Barred Warbler or the Red-breasted Flycatcher reach eastern England in autumn by down-wind directed drift (migration or dispersal).

## THE RADAR EVIDENCE

Full analysis of the radar watch must await another season's findings, but radar observations for the days in 1958 and 1959 when big and moderate arrivals were seen at the observatories are summarised below. The sea-area to which the observations refer was out to 50-60 miles off north and east Norfolk. In the following summary the reader may assume that, unless otherwise stated, the movements described were moderately large and consisted of the very small echoes that I have come to associate with small Passerine migration; but all other bird echoes seen on the day in question have been mentioned. The speed

and direction of the wind are those at 900 metres above Hemsby at 0500 hours, and from these figures I have calculated the heading of the migrants (these being rough estimates, as the wind was probably somewhat different where the birds were flying). Movements i-vii inclusive were watched by me, and viii-xii by M. T. Myres.

(i) Evening of 2nd to morning of 4th September 1958; big arrivals at observatories; 15 to 20-knot SE wind. At every visit, including all day on 3rd, I saw very many echoes moving between SW and WSW, so that the birds were heading a little west of south. (This movement was sometimes obscured by larger wader-type echoes moving west.)

(ii) 9th September 1958; moderate arrivals at observatories; 24-knot NW wind behind a depression moving east across North Sea during night. After the cessation of a nocturnal departure south of east, the only movement from 0700 hours through the morning and afternoon was almost due south, being to the east of Norfolk a little east of south and to the north-west slightly west of south. Hence the birds were heading about south-west and did not travel down-wind by "cyclonic approach".

(iii) 13th September 1958; moderate arrival at Cley only; 10-knot SE wind. Echoes moved between SW and WSW, so the birds' heading was near to south-west. The movement was almost restricted to the morning, with extremely little in the afternoon.

(iv) 2nd September 1959; moderate to small arrival at the observatories; 10-knot E wind. There were two rather small movements of echoes, SSW and slightly south of west respectively (the headings were not greatly different); heights were recorded to 15,000 feet.

(v) 6th September 1959; big arrival at Spurn, moderate at Cley; 11-knot SE wind. Between 0600 and 0700 hours the coast was sharply outlined on the radar display because a big SSW movement from over the sea stopped there, indicating that the birds descended on reaching it. The birds' heading was nearly due south. There were also small movements of Passerine-type echoes SSE and W, with a very few NW (down-wind), but the SSW movement was so much the largest, and stopped so abruptly at the coast, that it was presumably the Continental arrival seen at the observatories. Heights extended to 16,000 feet. All these movements had almost ceased by 0920 hours.

(vi) 11th September 1959; moderate arrival at Cley only; 5-knot SE wind. There were two small movements SSW and W respectively, with a very small one SSE (headings similar). Heights extended to 18,000 feet and once 19,000.

(vii) 17th September 1959; fairly large arrival at Spurn, small one at Cley; 16-knot NE wind. Between 0500 and 0630 hours there was a rather large movement SSW (heading similar). As on 6th September, the echoes stopped abruptly at the coast, meaning that the birds descended there. Heights were up to 16,000 feet, once 19,000. By 1000 hours this movement had been largely replaced or obscured by one WSW, which included larger wader-type echoes so was probably not the Continental arrival seen at the observatories.

(viii) 30th September 1959; moderate arrival at Spurn and Cley; 24-knot SE wind. The radar data were quite inconclusive, because small Passerine-type echoes (some going SW, others W and NW) were obscured by a big W movement including larger echoes, and as Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) were later seen coming in west off the sea, the W movement was presumably not the Continental arrival of small night-migrants at the observatories.

(ix) 4th October 1959; big arrivals at Spurn and Cley; 23-knot SE wind. There were two radar movements, one SSW (heading SSE), which was large at

0600 hours and moderate for the rest of the day, and the other WSW (heading SSW), which was small at 0600 hours and moderate thereafter, in the afternoon being rather larger than that tracked SSW. From the visit at 1000 hours onward the coast was sharply outlined, meaning that the birds descended on reaching it.

(x) 5th October 1959; big arrivals at Spurn and Cley; 20-knot SE wind. As on the previous day, there were many echoes moving both SSW and WSW, but those moving WSW (heading SSW) predominated throughout. Echoes over the land ceased about 0540 hours, after which the coast was sharply outlined, indicating that the birds descended there after it was light. Both movements were observed later in the morning, but they were then obscured by a big W movement, obviously of diurnal departures from Holland; the latter, unlike the others, continued inland and did not stop at the coast.

(xi) 7th October 1959; moderate arrival at Spurn, very small one at Cley; 7-knot wind from just west of south. Between 0530 and 0730 hours many echoes moved SSE and even more SSW (headings similar). The overland movement ceased about 0700, after which the coast was sharply demarcated, showing that the birds descended there. Heights extended to 15,000 feet. By 1000 hours the SSW movement had ceased, but the SSE one was still strong, as it was in the late afternoon.

(xii) As already mentioned, there was also a moderate passage at Spurn on 17th October 1959, with a 30-knot SSW wind, presumably a redetermined movement, when no bird-echoes were seen by radar out to sea.

Omitting the last instance, and also the eighth, when directions were indeterminate, there were radar records for ten big or moderate arrivals at the observatories. The only feature common to all of them was a movement over the sea of small Passerine-type echoes heading about SSW. Usually, though not always, this was the largest movement observed, and presumably it was the Continental arrival recorded at the observatories. This fits with the evidence given earlier that the birds in question have normally come from Scandinavia. During the biggest arrivals watched, on 2nd-3rd September 1958 and 4th-5th October 1959, bird-echoes heading SSW were present out to sea throughout the day, but on some other days only during the morning, and on a few occasions only during the early morning. Often in 1959 the echoes heading SSW were seen to stop abruptly at the coast, indicating that the birds descended there (a point that could not be checked in 1958). The actual track varied between WSW and south, depending on the direction of the wind, and the calculated heading varied between south-west and south (usually SSW), perhaps partly due to errors in assessing the wind. In addition to this movement, Passerine-type echoes were seen heading SSE on four days, just south of west on three days, and once in very small numbers north-west (down-wind), but these movements were too infrequent to have been the Continental arrivals.

The radar evidence therefore fits the view that the track of the Continental arrivals was a resultant between their heading and the wind. They did not normally come down-wind. Nor were disoriented movements seen on any of these occasions, thus agreeing

with the evidence given earlier in this paper that total overcast was at most a very subsidiary factor in these arrivals.

Radar also showed that on many other fine mornings in September 1958 and 1959, with light easterly, north-easterly and occasionally north-westerly winds throughout the North Sea, and with negligible or very small arrivals at the observatories, there were, nevertheless, moderate and occasionally large SSW movements of echoes in the North Sea north of Norfolk similar to those seen on the days with big and moderate Continental arrivals. This might suggest that the SSW movements on radar had nothing to do with the Continental arrivals, but in my view it really means that, with light winds, many Scandinavian night-migrants reach Norfolk but continue inland without alighting at the coast. This is supported by the fact that on the days in question there were usually some, though extremely small, arrivals at Cley of typical Continental species, and it reinforces the argument developed earlier that the number of migrants at the observatories depends partly on factors causing them to alight at the coast.

## CONCLUSION

If the reader wishes to plan his holiday on the English east coast to coincide with a big arrival of Continental night-migrants, he should obviously choose a period of anticyclonic weather in southern Scandinavia with a strong south-easterly wind in the southern North Sea (and he need pay no attention to overcast). But while most big and various moderate arrivals occurred in this type of weather, and while this type of weather rarely occurred without a sizeable arrival, some big and many moderate ones took place in other types of weather; hence other weather factors had an important influence at times. I began the present study with the unconscious assumption that all "drift-arrivals" had a single, if complex, cause, and that when the critical weather factors had been discovered and set out, one group of such factors would be found to have been associated with all the sizeable arrivals. But this was not so, and if the reader has been bewildered by parts of the foregoing evidence, it is not without good reason, The first conclusion, therefore, is that no one set of weather factors held for all "drift-arrivals", and that the answer is not single or simple.

As mentioned earlier, the size of Continental arrivals on the English east coast is, at least potentially, affected by (a) the numbers leaving southern Scandinavia, (b) the proportion drifted off-course by lateral winds, and (c) the proportion of those reaching England that alights at the coast. However, big and moderate arrivals occurred so infrequently that factors affecting (a), the numbers leaving Scandinavia, clearly had a very minor influence. If there is to be an arrival in eastern England from Scandinavia, migrants must of course leave

there during the night, and this factor provides part of the reason why most big and many moderate arrivals occurred in anticyclonic weather. But it is obvious that there must have been many nights when large numbers of migrants left Scandinavia without there being an appreciable arrival on the English east coast next day.

I at first followed the observatory workers in supposing that factors affecting (b), the westward drift of migrants in the North Sea by easterly winds, were of primary importance. It is hard to dissociate oneself from an idea now so generally accepted, and the term "drift-migrant" speaks for itself. Moreover my first analysis in Table III showed that nearly all big and most moderate arrivals in eastern England occurred with easterly winds throughout the North Sea, and most of the rest with an easterly wind in part of that area. I at first followed precedent, therefore, in ascribing the few arrivals with westerly winds throughout the North Sea to redetermined departures of migrants drifted over to England on an earlier occasion. Hence, though it soon became clear that the big and moderate arrivals were not correlated with full overcast, so that the manner of drift posulated by the observatory workers seemed inapplicable, I still supposed that these arrivals were primarily attributable to drift by lateral displacement.

Gradually, however, the contrary evidence accumulated. Firstly, there were many days with easterly winds throughout the North Sea but negligible arrivals at the observatories. Secondly, a few big and moderate arrivals occurred with a following north-easterly wind, or with an extremely light easterly wind, when westward drift was presumably negligible. Thirdly, a few moderate and many small arrivals that included Continental species took place with westerly winds throughout the North Sea, in circumstances in which redetermined departures could almost certainly be excluded. Fourthly, on about half of the occasions with a big or moderate arrival at one observatory, extremely few birds arrived at an adjacent observatory. Finally, there were many days of anticyclonic weather with very light winds, so that drift was negligible, when an extremely small number of Continental migrants arrived at the observatories, but radar revealed a moderately large movement heading SSW into East Anglia.

From this evidence I conclude two things. Firstly, in the absence of westward drift in the North Sea, there is a regular passage of night-migrants from Scandinavia to eastern England in autumn. Secondly, though arrivals tend to be larger with easterly winds, this is only partly due to drift, and partly to more birds leaving Scandinavia in the associated anticyclonic weather, while the numbers at the observatories are primarily influenced by the factors which cause passing migrants to alight at the coast instead of proceeding inland.

Bearing these considerations in mind, my provisional explanation

PLATE 51A. Male Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*), Hungary, June 1952. Note his purer black mask and the wing-patch confined to the primaries (page 399)

PLATE 51B. His mate just below their nest in a slender plum-tree; a fruit-tree site is common (page 400). She has a beetle, a favourite food of the species (page 402)

PLATE 51C. Their tree-fork nest with five nearly fledged young. Especially note that immatures lack the adult's black forehead (page 398) (*photos: K. Koffan*)

there during the night, and this factor provides part of the reason why most big and many moderate arrivals occurred in anticyclonic weather. But it is obvious that there must have been many nights when large numbers of migrants left Scandinavia without there being an appreciable arrival on the English east coast next day.

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Gradually, however, the contrary evidence accumulated. Firstly, there were many days with easterly winds throughout the North Sea but negligible arrivals at the observatories. Secondly, a few big and moderate arrivals occurred with a following north-easterly wind, or with an extremely light easterly wind, when westward drift was presumably negligible. Thirdly, a few moderate and many small arrivals that included Continental species took place with westerly winds throughout the North Sea, in circumstances in which redetermined departures could almost certainly be excluded. Fourthly, on about half of the occasions with a big or moderate arrival at one observatory, extremely few birds arrived at an adjacent observatory. Finally, there were many days of anticyclonic weather with very light winds, so that drift was negligible, when an extremely small number of Continental migrants arrived at the observatories, but radar revealed a moderately large movement heading SSW into East Anglia.

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PLATE 51C. Their tree-fork nest with five nearly fledged young. Especially note that immatures lack the adult's black forehead (page 398) (*photos: K. Koffán*)

PLATES 52 (*left*) and 53 (*above*). Female Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*), Bulgaria, June 1960. Note again the dark forehead, the proportions of tail and wings and the size of the wing-patch. Beetles, grasshoppers and mole-crickets form the main diet of this largely insectivorous species. The nestling bird in plate 53 is one of the shrike's own which died and had to be carried away. The nest is made of the soft leaves and flowers of weeds (page 401) (*photos: Eric Hosking*)

PLATE 54. Above, female Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*), Hungary, June 1952, showing the heavy bill (*photo: K. Koffán*). Below, the site of plates 50, 52 and 53, a thorny pear-tree with a trackside lookout in a cultivated area; the inset illustrates the bird's pattern and upright stance (page 400) (*photos: Eric Hosking*)

of the Continental arrivals at Spurn, Gibraltar Point and Cley is as follows. In September night-migrants set out over Scandinavia, especially in anticyclonic conditions, but more often than usually supposed in transitional or disturbed weather, except that they rarely set out with warm south-westerly or westerly winds. There is no reason to think that more set out on the first fine night after a disturbed spell than on each fine night during a settled spell. The migrants travel on a broad front with a heading, for those reaching England, of about SSW. They do not change this heading on reaching the Norwegian or Danish coast, and continue on a broad front SSW out to sea.

With extremely light winds, or with a following north-easterly, part of this migration reaches eastern England on its normal (undrifted) course, but most pass inland and extremely few (though usually some) land at the observatories each day. With south-westerly head-winds, when lateral drift is also negligible, migrants do not usually set out from Scandinavia, so none normally arrive in England (though occasionally some do). With north-westerly winds many usually leave Scandinavia, but with light winds most pass over the English coast without alighting and with strong winds many are presumably drifted eastward away from England, so that in either case few are seen at the observatories. With easterly and south-easterly winds, which usually occur with an anticyclone, particularly large numbers set out from Scandinavia and, in addition to those crossing England on their normal heading, others that would normally have passed further east are deflected to eastern England. The stronger the wind, the more extensive the deflection, but this tendency may be partly offset by a strong wind in Scandinavia militating against departures.

The track over the sea of the migrants reaching England is normally the resultant between their SSW heading and the wind (as shown for both easterly and north-westerly winds). The only exception is in fog or drizzle, which the birds rarely meet as they do not start in such conditions. In fog or drizzle at sea they are disoriented, so their headings become random and they are, on average, carried down-wind at the speed of the wind. But probably they rarely drift far in this way, since fog normally occurs with a light wind and the sun usually breaks through fog by day in September; hence the effect (if any) of fog is probably delay, rather than displacement, on the night crossing.

When the migrants reach England, many probably alight at the coast if there is a head-wind, a strong cross-wind, frontal rain or, perhaps, full overcast, and such factors have a bigger influence on the number of arrivals than either the weather in Scandinavia or the extent of drift in the North Sea. Further, they often produce marked differences in the number of arrivals at adjacent observatories on the same

day. It may be added that head-winds, strong cross-winds, frontal rain and full overcast are unusual on the east coast of England with the anticyclonic weather in which most migrants probably leave Scandinavia.

Finally a few eastern rarities, notably the Barred Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher but not the Bluethroat, arrive under rather different conditions from the main migrants, possibly on a juvenile dispersal (though not a down-wind one), but the reasons for this curious movement have not yet been elucidated.

The multiple explanation offered above seems to account for the main Continental arrivals in eastern England, without conflicting with any of the facts, while it also accords with what is known of migration elsewhere and introduces no new principle. If it is accepted, then the term "drift-migrant" should presumably be discarded, at least for the area under discussion, since many of the birds concerned may occur in eastern England in the absence of appreciable westward drift. Moreover, there is a sense in which every migrant is a "drift-migrant", except for the very few which have travelled with a completely following or completely opposed wind. In eastern England, also, there seems to be no correlation between the arrivals of Continental night-migrants and full overcast, and there seems no need, at least in this area, to postulate that migrants over the sea in full overcast descend low and, by reference to the waves, re-orient themselves to fly down-wind until they reach land, or that they fly down-wind round a depression ("cyclonic approach"), or that they use any other form of "down-wind directed drift" on migration or dispersal. Hence there is no need in this area to suppose that "drift-migration" is a special habit evolved as an adaptation to bring migrants disoriented by overcast at sea quickly back to land. Finally, I think it likely that these conclusions hold more widely than for eastern England and the southern North Sea.

SUMMARY

(1) The arrivals of night-migrant chats, warblers and flycatchers at English east coast observatories were analysed each day from 20th August to 10th October 1949-1959 inclusive.

(2) Most migrants evidently came from Scandinavia, but they were a minute fraction of the birds leaving there in autumn. A few were departures from England.

(3) Most big and moderate arrivals occurred with an anticyclone in Scandinavia and strong south-easterly winds in the southern North Sea, but others took place in a variety of different conditions, a few with westerly winds throughout the North Sea.

(4) An anticyclone in southern Scandinavia favours departures, but on many such days there were negligible arrivals in eastern England. Warm south-westerly weather is very unfavourable, but a few arrivals occurred in disturbed weather.

(5) Most arrivals took place with easterly winds, partly due to drift but partly

because east winds occur with anticyclones, but on many other days with easterly winds there were negligible arrivals. Part of the Scandinavian migration crosses eastern England in the absence of drift.

(6) The most influential factors were those affecting the proportion of migrants alighting at the English coast. Their influence was often local. Alighting is probably favoured by head-winds, strong cross-winds, rain and full overcast.

(7) Many big and moderate arrivals occurred when neither fog nor total cloud was recorded at either end of the North Sea.

(8) The migrants' track was the resultant between a SSW heading and the wind.

(9) At least in the area studied, there is no need to postulate that "down-wind directed drift" occurs, or that drift-movements are an adaptation enabling migrants disoriented by overcast at sea to regain the land as quickly as possible.

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## APPENDIX A—SUMMARY OF MOVEMENTS AT THREE BIRD OBSERVATORIES ON THE EAST COAST OF ENGLAND, 20TH AUGUST-10TH OCTOBER 1949-1959, GROUPED UNDER SIZES AND AREAS OF ORIGIN

*Days with moderate Continental arrivals*

In 1949, 21st, 24th and 27th August, 4th, 5th, 10th and 13th September, 8th October; in 1950, 23rd and 26th August, 6th October; in 1951, 6th September, 4th October; in 1952, 4th and 30th September, 1st and 3rd October; in 1953, 15th, 16th and 23rd September; in 1954, 20th August, 12th September; in 1955, 20th and 29th August, 24th September; in 1956, 10th, 18th and 24th September; in 1957, 30th September; in 1958, 1st, 6th and 9th September; in 1959, 22nd August, 2nd, 17th and 30th September, 7th October.

*Days with small Continental arrivals*

In 1949, 12th, 22nd and 24th September, 7th October; in 1950, 21st and 31st August, 15th September; in 1951, 5th, 7th and 10th September, 3rd October; in 1952, 23rd August, 9th September, 5th October; in 1953, 22nd August, 6th and 7th September; in 1954, 28th August, 1st and 6th September; in 1955, 23rd and 28th August, 6th and 7th September; in 1956, 3rd, 6th, 9th, 19th and 25th September; in 1957, 29th August, 8th, 12th and 13th September; in 1958, 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st August, 13th September; in 1959, 31st August, 1st, 3rd, 11th, 14th and 19th September.

*Days with very small Continental arrivals*

In 1949, 14th and 23rd September; in 1950, 1st and 3rd October; in 1951, 30th August and 8th October; in 1952, 5th, 11th, 18th, 19th and 22nd September; in 1953, 30th August; in 1954, 23rd August, 9th and 30th September, 3rd October; in 1955, 24th and 25th August, 20th and 23rd September; in 1956, 7th, 22nd, 23rd and 26th September; 2nd and 8th October; in 1957, 3rd, 7th, 16th, 17th, 28th and 29th September; 3rd October; in 1958, 17th and 26th September; in 1959, 7th and 8th September.

*Days with moderate British-type departures*

In 1949, 10th September; in 1950, 3rd, 9th and 10th September; in 1951, 20th, 23rd and 28th August, 16th September; in 1953, 21st and 25th August; in 1954, 4th September; in 1956, 21st and 29th August, 8th September; in 1957, 21st August; in 1959, 23rd August.

*Days with small British-type departures*

In 1949, 29th August; in 1950, 14th and 25th September; in 1951, 25th August, 5th September; in 1952, 24th and 28th August, 2nd, 6th and 7th September; in 1953, 23rd, 29th and 31st August, 4th September; in 1955, 31st August, 3rd September; in 1956, 20th August, 14th September; in 1957, 26th and 27th August; in 1958, 24th August, 7th and 8th September; in 1959, 30th August, 16th September.

*Days with very small British-type departures*

In 1949, 1st September; in 1950, 5th and 28th September; in 1952, 29th and 30th August, 12th, 14th and 27th September; in 1953, 24th August, 3rd and 9th September; in 1954, 23rd and 27th August, 7th and 18th September; in 1955, 22nd August, 10th September; in 1956, 5th September; in 1957, 28th and 31st August; in 1958, 21st August, 21st September; in 1959, 27th August.

*Days with a negligible arrival, anticyclonic weather and easterly winds throughout North Sea*

In 1949, 25th and 26th August, 20th and 21st September; in 1950, 1st September; in 1951, 9th September, 5th, 6th and 7th October; in 1952, 15th September; in 1955, 27th August, 8th September; in 1958, 18th September; in 1959, 1st, 6th, 8th and 9th October.

## APPENDIX B—SURVEY OF ARRIVALS AT THREE BIRD OBSERVATORIES ON THE EAST COAST OF ENGLAND, 20TH AUGUST-10TH OCTOBER 1949-1959, IN ALL TYPES OF WEATHER EXCEPT ANTICYCLONIC WITH EASTERLY WINDS THROUGHOUT THE NORTH SEA

The weather-types in the following sections have been numbered as in Table III, and they start with type ii since type i was described in the text. To save space, the term "arrival" means a Continental-type arrival, and no comments have been given for the days with British-type departures. Small and very small arrivals have been combined under the term "small". The weather data from the stations in south Norway and north-west Denmark have been referred to as from the "northern North Sea" though strictly north-eastern. The wind-speed is always that at 900 metres above Norfolk in the morning. The days with fog, rain or total cloud are all noted, being scored as "$\frac{1}{2}$" each when two of them were recorded by adjacent stations on the same occasion, while the days when none of them were recorded are unspecified. To make for easier reading, I have normally placed first in each section any factors that had a suggestive influence.

(ii) *Anticyclonic with light variable or N wind in northern and E wind in southern North Sea*
Much less favourable than type i weather, as the 22 days included only one big and three moderate arrivals, probably not because of the absence of westward drift in the northern North Sea, but because of the very light winds in the southern North Sea. The mean speed for the twelve days with E to SSE winds was 12 knots, maximum 18 knots (*cf.* a mean of 20 knots for big and moderate arrivals in type i weather), but for the one big and three moderate arrivals in type ii weather, the

mean wind-speed was only 9 knots. On eight days the wind was SE in the southern North Sea, including the one big and two of the moderate arrivals; the wind was E for the other moderate arrival and on one other day, and NE on twelve days. In the northern North Sea fog occurred on three days, including the big arrival and one moderate arrival, and total cloud occurred for one moderate and one negligible arrival. In the southern North Sea fog occurred for two small and two negligible arrivals, rain for two negligible arrivals, and total cloud for one moderate and one small arrival.

(iii) *Anticyclonic with E wind in northern and W wind in southern North Sea*

About as favourable as type ii, since the 20 days included one big and two moderate arrivals. On 17 days with SW wind in the southern North Sea, its mean speed was 5½ knots for the two moderate arrivals, 10 knots for the five small ones and 18½ knots for the ten negligible ones. On the other three days the wind in the southern North Sea was NW for two negligible arrivals and one big one (with a speed of 13 knots). In the northern North Sea the wind was SE on 15 nights, including both moderate and four small arrivals, and E on five nights, including one big and one small arrival; fog occurred for 1½ small and two negligible arrivals, rain for one small and ½ negligible one, total cloud for the one big, both moderate, 1½ small and 5½ negligible ones. In the southern North Sea fog occurred for 1½ moderate, three small and two negligible arrivals, rain for two negligible ones and total cloud for the one big, ½ moderate, one small and five negligible ones.

(iv) *Anticyclonic with W wind in northern and E wind in southern North Sea*

Less favourable than types ii or iii, for the 29 days included no big and only two moderate arrivals, again probably not because there was no westward drift in the northern North Sea, but because of the very light wind in the southern North Sea. The mean for 18 mornings with an E to SSE wind was only 11 knots, maximum 17 knots. In the northern North Sea the wind was nearly always NW, but between W and SW for one small and six negligible arrivals; fog occurred for only ½ small and 2½ negligible arrivals, rain for one negligible one and total cloud for both moderate, 4½ small and 10½ negligible ones. In the southern North Sea fog occurred for two small and 1½ negligible arrivals, rain for one small and 1½ negligible ones and total cloud for five negligible ones. The wind was nearly E at 5-10 knots for both moderate arrivals, and equally often NE, E and SE for the small and negligible ones. There seemed nothing distinctive about the weather for the two moderate arrivals.

(v) *Anticyclonic with W wind throughout North Sea*

Negligible arrivals on all 20 days, possibly due partly to the absence of westward drift though other factors were certainly involved. On five nights the wind in southern Scandinavia was SW and therefore warm, which is normally unfavourable for autumn departures; it was also strong in the southern North Sea. On the other 15 nights the wind in southern Scandinavia was NW, so presumably rather cold, and big departures from there presumably occurred. But on nine of them the wind in the southern North Sea was extremely light, only 2-7 knots at 900 metres, and the mean for all 15 days was only 9 knots. Further, on some of these days, notably six in September 1959, extremely small arrivals took place at the observatories; this suggests that Continental migrants were coming in but that most did not stop at the coast, a suggestion fully corroborated by radar. On only two of these 15 mornings was the wind in the southern North Sea NW, at 16-24 knots, which might perhaps have drifted migrants away from England, while on two more it was SW at 17 knots. Round the northern North Sea fog occurred on 3½ nights and total cloud on 5½. Round the southern North Sea fog occurred on three mornings, rain on one and total cloud on six.

(vi) *Transitional with E wind throughout North Sea*

Slightly more favourable than any except type i, for the 25 days included one big and five moderate arrivals. The big arrival, with extremely light winds, was described in the text and Table II; since the circumstances were so unusual it is unfortunate that only Spurn was manned that day. In the southern North Sea the wind was SE or SSE on 15 mornings, which included all five moderate arrivals (mean speed 10 knots) and six of the seven small ones (mean speed 17 knots), but only four of the nine negligible ones (mean speed 17 knots); on the rest it was NE or NNE. In the northern North Sea the wind was SE for three moderate, three small and three negligible arrivals, E for one moderate and one small one and NE for one moderate, three small and six negligible ones. In the northern North Sea fog occurred for two small arrivals, total cloud for the one big, two moderate, four small and five negligible ones. In the southern North Sea fog occurred for one moderate, 2½ small and one negligible arrival, rain for 1½ small and one negligible one, total cloud for two moderate, two small and four negligible ones.

(vii) *Transitional with light variable wind in northern and E wind in southern North Sea*

Only two days; one moderate arrival occurred with a 4-knot ENE wind and fog in the southern North Sea, and total cloud in the northern North Sea, one negligible arrival with fog in the northern North Sea and an 8-knot SE wind in the southern North Sea.

(viii) *Transitional with E wind in northern and W wind in southern North Sea*

The 16 days included one moderate arrival with SE wind and fog in the northern North Sea and a 5-knot SW wind and total cloud in the southern North Sea. One small arrival, presumably Continental as it occurred at Cley as well as Spurn, took place with SE wind and total cloud in the northern North Sea and frontal rain with a 30-knot SW wind over the Norfolk coast. The other occurred with a NE wind and total cloud in the northern North Sea and NW wind and total cloud in the southern North Sea. The ten days with negligible arrivals and the three with "B" movements included five with a NE wind in the northern North Sea and a NW wind further south, and eight with a SE wind in the northern North Sea and a SW wind further south; in the northern North Sea fog occurred with two, rain with two, and total cloud with seven, and in the southern North Sea fog occurred with one, rain with one and total cloud with five.

(ix) *Transitional with W wind in northern and E wind in southern North Sea*

The eleven days included only three small arrivals, all with NW wind in the northern North Sea, two with SE and one with NE wind further south. Hence in transitional as in settled and disturbed weather, arrivals were commoner with an easterly wind in the northern and a westerly wind in the southern North Sea, than with the reverse. For the negligible arrivals, the wind in the northern North Sea was NW for six and SW for two, in the southern North Sea NE for five and SE for three. In the northern North Sea, fog occurred with ½ negligible arrival, rain with one small one and total cloud with 6½ negligible ones, and in the southern North Sea fog occurred with 2½ negligible arrivals, rain with two small and two negligible ones and total cloud with 1½ negligible ones.

(x) *Transitional with W wind throughout North Sea*

The 77 days included 64 with negligible arrivals and another eight with purely British movements. Further, one of the two moderate movements, recorded only at Spurn, was probably a redetermined departure, since it was primarily of Pied

Flycatchers and occurred with a 30-knot SSW wind only three days after a larger arrival there of the same species. But the other moderate arrival was presumably genuine, as it consisted primarily of Redstarts and Robins, with one Pied Flycatcher, and there were no Continental arrivals in eastern England during the preceding fortnight; the wind was light NW throughout the North Sea, of 13 knots above Norfolk; no overcast was recorded. There was also one small arrival with a light SW wind and two with fairly strong NW winds, one of the latter occurring at Cley, where British departures were hardly ever seen; there was total cloud in the northern North Sea for one of these and in the southern North Sea for another. For the 64 negligible arrivals the wind was north of west in the northern North Sea for about 38 and in the southern North Sea for about 27, while total cloud, rain or fog was recorded in the northern North Sea for 44 and in the southern for 25.

(xi) *Disturbed with E wind in North Sea*

The six days included one moderate arrival with E wind and rain in the northern North Sea and a wind just N of E and rain in the southern North Sea, with a depression in the North Sea moving east during the night; also one very small arrival in clear weather with NNE winds; and four negligible arrivals, all with SE winds and rain in the northern North Sea and with winds between NE and S, three of them with total cloud in the southern North Sea.

(xii) *Disturbed with E wind in northern and W wind in southern North Sea*

58 days, of two kinds. On 36 days the wind was SE in the northern North Sea and SW in the southern, and these included one moderate arrival against a 15-knot SW wind, but otherwise only one very small passage with a strong SW wind which was probably a British departure. On the other 22 days the wind was NE in the northern North Sea and NW in the southern, with a depression in the North Sea moving east during the night—the "cyclonic approach" of observatory workers—and these included two moderate and two small arrivals. Similar weather, with easterly winds to the north of a depression moving east in the North Sea at night and a NW wind in the southern North Sea next morning, also occurred on three days with more settled type-iii conditions and included one big arrival; and the same weather occurred for one negligible arrival with type-viii conditions, as well as for the one moderate arrival with type-xi conditions (except that on the last occasion the wind had not yet reached NW by the early morning). Hence there were in all 27 days with this type of weather, which included one big, three moderate and two small arrivals. On the 58 days of type-xii weather, fog, rain or total cloud was recorded in the northern North Sea almost every night, though not for one moderate arrival, and in the southern North Sea for about half the mornings, including two moderate and one of the small arrivals.

(xiii) *Disturbed with W wind in northern and E wind in southern North Sea*

The four days included one very small and two negligible arrivals.

(xiv) *Disturbed with W wind throughout North Sea*

Out of 218 days there were negligible arrivals on 153 and purely British-type departures on 37 (together 87%); but also three moderate, ten small and 15 very small arrivals that included typical Continental migrants. The moderate arrival on 10th September 1949, with moderate SW winds throughout the North Sea, was presumably a British-type departure from England that included a few Redstarts, a Bluethroat and an Aquatic Warbler that had entered the country on the big Continental arrival three days earlier. The moderate arrival on 6th October 1950 occurred with strong SW winds (40 knots above west Norfolk), but since it included

many Goldcrests and several Pied Flycatchers, and there had been no sizeable arrival of either species in the preceding month, it was presumably from the Continent. The other moderate arrival, on 12th September 1954, included a few Redstarts, Garden Warblers and Pied Flycatchers, and was almost certainly from the Continent, as it was recorded at all three observatories, including Cley, where British departures were very rare; and further there had been no big or moderate Continental arrival on the east coast in the previous three weeks. It occurred with a 20-knot W wind above east Norfolk and, for both this and the moderate arrival in 1950, total cloud was recorded in the northern but not the southern North Sea. Although the other 25 arrivals were small and very small, the frequency with which, and the circumstances in which, they occurred make it extremely unlikely that most of them were redetermined departures, and this particularly applies to the seven between 29th August and 17th September 1957, discussed in the text. There was total cloud in the northern North Sea for nearly all these arrivals, and in the southern North Sea for nearly half of them, and total cloud was also frequent with negligible arrivals.

# Studies of less familiar birds

## 106. Lesser Grey Shrike

*By I. J. Ferguson-Lees*

*Photographs by Eric Hosking and K. Kofján*

(Plates 50-54)

WHEN THE FIRST VOLUME of *The Handbook* was published in 1938, only 22 records of the Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*) in the British Isles were admitted and five of those cannot now be accepted. Only 17 Lesser Grey Shrikes in nearly a hundred years since the first was identified in 1842—yet from the autumn of 1952 to the spring of 1960 at least 13 well-authenticated occurrences have taken place, a third of these being trapped and ringed. In 1958 two were recorded (*Brit. Birds*, 53: 171) and, although there was none in 1959, there have already been two this year. This is yet another illustration of the way in which the greatly increased ranks of competent observers and ringers have shown birds formerly regarded as extremely rare vagrants to be of almost annual occurrence.

In this country we tend to think of the Great Grey Shrike (*L. excubitor*) as a northern breeder which comes to us in winter, and of the Lesser Grey as a southern species. In fact, however, the former with its much vaster range extends considerably further south (as well as north), while the Lesser Grey nests or has nested in the east Baltic states and north-west Russia at 59°N, on the same latitude as Orkney. Its normal breeding range is from NE Spain (Costa Brava) and central and southern France eastwards through Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. However, in much of this area it is greatly outnumbered by

the Great Grey and it is in SE Europe—Italy and more particularly the Balkans and southern Russia—that it really comes into its own. In Bulgaria, where most of these photographs were obtained, it is a widespread bird that one sees continually along the telegraph wires. It appears to extend north to about 55° in European Russia and to about 53°-56° in Siberia, while its southern limits are Turkey and northern Iran; eastwards it reaches the upper stretches of the Rivers Ob and Irtish in the Altai region.

The range of the Lesser Grey Shrike is thus about 1,500 miles at most from north to south and something over 4,000 miles from west to east—nothing like the round-the-world, four-continent distribution of the Great Grey. However, it is much more migratory than the larger species, being a summer-visitor throughout its range and wintering in Africa, largely south of the Equator.

The Lesser and Great Grey Shrikes are easily confused by the unwary, especially if the observer has no previous experience of the former and only a limited acquaintance with the latter. The notorious "Berkhamsted Grey Shrike" was a case in point: a bird regularly watched by experienced observers in March and April 1940, and again in the winters of 1940-41 and 1941-42, was identified by all concerned as *L. minor* until in February 1942 it was seen by the late B. W. Tucker in company with H. G. and W. B. Alexander and shown by them to be an aberrant and probably rather small Great Grey (*Brit. Birds,* 34: 17 and 178; and 36: 51-53). This case is probably unknown to many of the post-war generation of bird-watchers and the warning it gave is not always heeded, judging by some dubious-looking records in county reports.

The most recent identification books still tell us that the Lesser Grey Shrike is separated by its smaller size, broad black face-markings continuing across forehead, pink under-parts, lack of white superciliary, and broad wing-bar—but size, as a start, is unreliable unless a direct comparison is possible. The black forehead of the adult male is sharp and clear (plate 51a), but the female's is browner and mixed with grey even in the breeding season (plates 49, 52a, 54a) and some adult females in winter have almost no dark colour on the forehead at all, this being confined to a few spots (e.g., *Brit. Birds,* 50: 397). Females and first-winter birds make up the bulk of the Lesser Greys recorded here in autumn and the latter have no black whatsoever on the front of the head; this is illustrated by place 51c since the first-winter head-pattern is often similar to the juvenile, but it is better shown by an earlier photograph (*Brit. Birds,* 46: plate 31b) of an immature in Northumberland in September 1952 (a curious bird that later fell down a chimney in Aberdeen!). The last point to bear in mind on the face-pattern is that fact that some less clearly marked Great Greys seem to show a dark forehead at certain angles, as was the case at Berkhamsted. The exact

distribution of black on the Lesser Grey is perhaps best shown in plate 52c which is worth comparing with plate A40.*

To look for a moment at some of the other oft-quoted field-characters, pink under-parts are just as much a feature of the Great Grey Shrikes of southern Europe (*L. e. meridionalis*) and of some individuals of the typical race in northern Europe, and so they alone are of little value. The lack of a white superciliary is a useful point (compare plate 50 etc. with plates A37, A39b and A40), but it is important to remember that in juvenile Great Greys the superciliary is often small or absent (plate A38b) and that it may still be small or almost absent in first-winter birds and some adults (Berkhamsted again). Lastly, while the white wing-bar of the Lesser Grey Shrike is always broad and confined to the bases of the primaries (plates 51a and 52b), that of the Great Grey is very variable in different parts of its range. Most of the Great Greys that appear in this country have a long, narrow bar that is distinctively spread across the bases of the outer secondaries as well as of the primaries (plate A39b), this forming a double patch on the closed wing; but southern populations (e.g. *meridionalis*) have the white confined to the primaries like the Lesser Grey does and in southern Asiatic birds this patch may be as broad as in any of the latter species (see plate A41a, illustrating the wing of *L. e. pallidirostris*). Thus, to sum up, all these commonly quoted points need to be used with caution and only one of them, the black forehead, is entirely conclusive by itself *when present and when the observer can be certain that no trick of the light is involved.*

What other characters can be used to separate these two species in the field (wing-formula and measurements, of course, leave no doubt in the hand)? In particular, how can one be certain of the identity of immature Lesser Greys in autumn? A plumage feature which is not always given the prominence it deserves is the differing amount of white on the scapulars. The Lesser has some scapular feathers edged white, but the Great Grey's have long white tips. The result is a conspicuous white band between the grey of the back and the black of the wings in the latter species (plates A37 and A40), while the Lesser Grey shows hardly any white at all (plates 50, 52b and 53). The Great Grey may also show a fair amount of white on the rump and upper tail-coverts, which the smaller bird does not. More important, however, is the quite different "jizz" of the two birds—tail-length, stance, wing-proportions and beak-shape. Much of the size difference between the two species lies in the fact that the Lesser Grey's tail averages three-quarters of an inch the shorter. It is an ordinary sort of tail with

*In the next two paragraphs comparison is several times made with the photographs of Great Grey Shrikes that appeared in our series in 1957 (*Brit. Birds*, 50: 250-253, plates 37-40). To avoid the tedium of repeating the full reference, the numbers of those plates are given on their own with the prefix "A".

a fair but not extravagant amount of white at the sides; the Great Grey's is disproportionately long and flaunting, looks unwieldy and is markedly graduated with striking white patches on either side at the tip (compare plates 50, 52 and 53 with A37 and A40). As a result the Great Grey tends to perch in a rather thrush-like way, leaning forward to balance, while the smaller bird has an upright stance, often more so than in the inset on plate 54b. The *Field Guide's* method of illustrating related species in similar postures is therefore misleading here. Next, the wings of the smaller bird are actually directly the longer and, even though the difference is slight, this means that in the Great Grey they seem to meet at the base of the tail (plates A37 and A40), whereas they extend noticeably down it in the Lesser (plates 50, 52b and 54a). Lastly, the Lesser Grey's beak is at once shorter and deeper, looking very stubby (plates 50 and 54a), while the Great Grey's is comparatively long and thin (plates A37 and A38a): this again is surprisingly noticeable in the field.

The Lesser Grey Shrike is primarily, but not entirely, a lowland bird. In Bulgaria we (Guy Mountfort's expedition, 1960) found it in any open country dotted with trees large or small up to 3,000 feet above sea level. It does not live in dense woodland and not much even in open woodland like the Great Grey, Red-backed (*L. cristatus collurio*) and Woodchat (*L.senator*) sometimes do. It is mainly a bird of cultivated areas (particularly where there are orchards and vineyards) and tree-dotted grassland, showing almost a preference for the edges of roads, cart-tracks and paths (plate 54b).

It is not a bush-nester at all and in this is closest to the Woodchat which is likewise primarily a tree-nester, while the Great Grey and Red-backed frequently build in shrubs, bushes and hedges. The type of tree may be anything from a 10-foot roadside sapling to a towering giant five times as high, though in many areas fruit-trees are much favoured. In Germany, Hantge (1957) found most nests in uncultivated fruit-trees—18 in pear, seven in apple, four in plum, three in cherry and one in walnut. K. Koffán (*in litt.* 1957) tells us that in his part of Hungary (Budaörs) the Lesser Grey Shrikes are almost entirely in the vineyards, particularly partly neglected areas dotted with fruit trees; there walnuts are the favourite sites ("probably because they are the tallest"), but the birds also build in pear, almond, cherry and plum. Similarly, three of six nests found in Bulgaria were in fruit-trees. Koffán goes on to add that where acacias grow the Lesser Greys show a great preference for them and often build very high up. In Bulgaria our highest (40 feet) and lowest (7 feet) nests were both in acacias, the latter in an 11-foot sapling by a main road. These extremes are both outside the range of 10-30 feet given in *The Handbook* and this aspect clearly varies in different parts of Europe. Niethammer (1937) gives

7 to 9 metres (about 23 to 29½ feet) as the rule in Germany, but, near Heidelberg, Hantge (1957) found the average height of 33 nests to be 3.9 metres (roughly 12¾ feet) with a range of 2.5 to 7 metres (about 8¼ to 23 feet). Koffán (*in litt.* 1957) states that he has never found a nest in Hungary lower than 3.5 metres (about 11½ feet). The site photographed in Bulgaria was 8 feet high.

Often—and this has been noted by most writers and by us in Bulgaria—there is a tendency for some six or eight pairs to nest fairly close together as if in a loose colony. The same thing happens with Red-backed Shrikes, but not so much with Woodchats and probably hardly at all with Great Greys. The colonies seem to remain fairly constant from year to year and Hantge's paper confirms that individual birds return to a place once they have nested there.

The nest itself (plates 50 and 53) is quite different from the mainly grass and moss structures of the Great Grey and Red-backed species, being more like that of the similarly tree-nesting Woodchat. But for a twig base, it is composed almost entirely of the soft and flexible stalks of various plants, usually with the leaves and flowers still attached. *The Handbook* mentions *Gnaphalium, Filago and Thymus,* while Koffán says that those most frequently used in Hungary are *Erigeron, Arenaria, Medicago, Achillea, Artemisia* and *Capsella.* Twiglets and bents, string, roots, rags, wool, hair and feathers are also woven in, but the plants form the bulk of a structure that is quite large, yet compact and closely knit. It is usually sited in a fork in one of the main branches near the trunk, but may occasionally be well out on quite thin twigs.

Niethammer (1937) and Olivier (1944) give the usual clutch as four or five, sometimes six, exceptionally seven. The full clutches found by Hantge seem to have consisted of six or seven eggs, however, while Koffán states that most of the nests he has found in Hungary have contained six eggs. Three nests in Bulgaria with full clutches had five, six and seven eggs. The first young hatch 15 days after the laying of the last egg, but Hantge considers that the incubation period should more properly be regarded as 16 days since the female starts to sit from the laying of the penultimate egg. The young are generally said to spend 14-15 days in the nest, but Hantge records cases of 18 and 19 days for the fledging period. Both parents feed the young, but at the nest photographed in Bulgaria the male was very shy and would not usually approach while the hide was close to the nest. Incidentally, *The Handbook* states that both sexes build the nest and this is confirmed by Hantge, but he goes on to say that he has never found a male incubating or brooding.

Though the second largest of the four common European shrikes, it is much the least ferocious, both in its feeding habits and towards other birds in its territory, though it will tackle any predator up to the size of a

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) if it is threatening the nest. It is almost exclusively insectivorous, with beetles, grasshoppers, mole-crickets, moths and butterflies forming the bulk of its prey; large flies, bumble-bees and millipedes have also been recorded. From its perch it usually flies direct to catch an insect in the air or on the ground, but it will also hover when hunting. Dementiev (1954) mentions land-molluscs among the food in the U.S.S.R. and says that the species will sometimes attack small birds and rodents; and Hantge recorded field voles (*Microtus*) and a musk shrew (*Crocidura*) among the prey (see also Lierath 1954). It does not appear to indulge in the shrike habit of impaling prey in "larders".

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# Notes

**Curlew Sandpipers wintering in Lancashire.**—On 2nd January 1960, I saw a Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris testacea*) on the mud-flats of the Ribble Estuary at Lytham, Lancashire. On 12th February there were three there and from then until April up to six were seen almost daily by various observers including N. Harwood and P. Carah as well as myself. The birds may also have spent the early part of the winter at Lytham; at least four were seen there during the autumn of 1959 and they could easily have been overlooked afterwards.

The last time any of the party were seen was on 26th April when there were two, but previously they had been missing from the 9th to the 18th and during those ten days a marked change in their appearance took place. On the 8th all were still in full winter plumage, whereas by the 19th four were in almost complete summer dress, though a fifth has only irregular brownish markings underneath and the sixth had not altered. This bird was still unchanged on 26th April when it was one of the last two seen. K. W. CLEMENTS

[Identification details have been supplied. Curlew Sandpipers are rarely observed in Britain in winter and we know of no previous record of such a party, though several other species of waders, formerly regarded simply as passage-migrants, are now seen to an increasing extent between autumn and spring (e.g., *Brit. Birds*, 49: 167-171; 50: 544; and 51: 525-527).—EDS.]

**Huge flock of Grey Phalaropes in the Isles of Scilly.**—The Grey Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) is an annual visitor to the Isles of Scilly in autumn, its occurrence invariably associated with periods of westerly gales in the Atlantic. At such times single birds and small parties are frequently seen in the bays around the islands, a particularly favoured spot being the area of sheltered water between Wingletang Ledges and Horse Point, the southernmost tip of St. Agnes. An invasion of these birds which took place during October 1959 was, however, quite unprecedented and included a most remarkable flock on the 23rd. An extract from the writer's notebook for that day reads: "The sea around Horse Point was carpeted with phalaropes, the water being a continuously moving mass of birds as party after party flew up to maintain their positions in the currents around the rocks".

In 1959 the first Grey Phalaropes of the autumn were recorded on 9th October when the writer and R. E. Scott saw a party of about 28 off Wingletang Ledges. From the 10th to the 13th small groups were seen off St. Agnes and others were reported by boatmen off Bryher and Tresco and around the Western Rocks. During the 14th-22nd there was a complete absence of records of phalaropes, but at 1500 hours on the 23rd, following several days of continuous westerly winds, an enormous flock was found on the sea just off Horse Point. Several counts were attempted and the flock was cautiously estimated at not less than 350 birds. An hour later the writer returned in company with Miss H. M. Quick and, although the visibility was beginning to fail, the sea was still carpeted with phalaropes. A single Red-necked Phalarope (*Ph. lobatus*) was identified among them. Earlier in the day Miss Quick had seen a party of 27 Grey and three Red-necked Phalaropes off St. Warna's Cove. On the 24th about 100 phalaropes, including the single Red-necked, were still present off Horse Point, but by the following day only six remained. On the 26th the writer left Scilly and single birds and small parties were seen in St. Mary's Sound and on the Scilly-Penzance crossing, particularly in the area of the Wolf Rock lighthouse. There was a gap in observations during the last few days of October and no phalaropes were seen in the first week of November, but on the 7th K. H. Hyatt and C. A. Walker saw a party of 20 on the sea between St. Agnes and Tresco. The last records of the autumn in the Isles of Scilly were two birds on 11th and 13th November. B. S. MILNE

**Woodpigeon nesting on ground.**—On 18th September 1959, I was informed by R. Bitmead, of Manor Farm, Cholsey, Berkshire, that two young Woodpigeons (*Columba palumbus*) had been discovered in a nest in oat-stubble on his land a week previously. I visited the site that day and found that the two young, which were almost completely fledged, were lying in a slight depression sheltered by stubble and containing a thick growth of knotweed (*Polygonum aviculare*). There was no sign of any external building material, but from the presence of old droppings and scale-powder I had no doubt that the birds had hatched there. The field is part of an unenclosed arable tract of about 200 acres, bounded by a road, a farm-track and a railway fence. The stubble was about 60 acres in extent and the nest was some 200 yards in from the nearest boundary road. The nearest orthodox tree-site for Woodpigeons was 300 yards away—an avenue of horse chestnuts which is, in fact, habitually used by this species. W. D. CAMPBELL

[R. K. Murton, who has made a special study of this species, informs us that it is not unusual for Woodpigeons to nest on the ground, particularly in areas where the population of them is high, but in such cases there is usually plenty of cover (a bramble thicket, for example) immediately over the nest. One ground-nest in a hazel coppice was not directly protected from above, but in that case the trees were dense and made the site dark. He has never seen a nest on the ground in the open. He adds that ground nests are usually in a scrape and do not often contain much material, though sometimes there is the equivalent of the normal lining to a tree-nest. Derek Goodwin points out that no real change in nesting behaviour, other perhaps than a difference in the number of movements involved, would be necessary for a Woodpigeon to form a scrape on the ground, since scraping actions are a normal part of nest-building in pigeons.—EDS.]

**Bee-eaters diving into water.**—With reference to the recent notes on this subject (*Brit. Birds*, 53: 130-131 and 221), I can report similar behaviour by Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters (*Merops superciliosus*) and Little Green Bee-eaters (*M. orientalis*) in Egypt. On 10th April 1945 the late R. H. Greaves and I saw a party of 29 Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters near Giza. They were perching on telephone wires 20-30 feet above a canal and from them diving into the water. Sometimes they immersed only their heads and under-parts after hovering a few feet above the surface, but they also often plunged straight down from the wires and submerged almost completely. Although we watched for about 30 minutes, we saw no food being taken from the water. There was, indeed, an abundance of high-flying insects in the area and some of the birds were busily feeding on those. Diving, preening and aerial feeding seemed, in fact, to be the sequence of events and so we concluded that

they were simply bathing in the water. They were very active and I assume the behaviour continued for a considerable time after we left.

The Little Green Bee-eaters were also observed at Giza, on 15th September 1945. There were five of them and they were continually hovering and diving into a small and shallow pool, then returning to an adjacent shrub to preen. Sometimes they actually splashed about on the surface of the water and they were certainly just bathing. Incidentally, I never saw European Bee-eaters (*M. apiaster*) diving, although these birds are plentiful on passage in Egypt and often skim down to the surface of water to drink. C. A. WHITE

# Recent reports and news

## *By I. J. Ferguson-Lees and Kenneth Williamson*

*The items here are largely unchecked reports, and must not be regarded as authenticated records. They are selected, on the present writers' judgment alone, from sources generally found to be reliable. Observers' names are usually omitted for reasons of space and in case a report is subsequently rejected, and none of the items will be mentioned in our annual Index. Readers are asked to submit anything of interest as quickly as possible.*

This summary is mainly concerned with the second half of July and the first three weeks of August. It thus deals with the chief excitements of the opening phase of the autumn, though we mentioned some early wanderers and the beginning of the return wader passage in the last issue (pp. 367-368).

### EARLY VAGRANTS FROM THE NEARCTIC

Contrary to the usual position (see, for example, pp. 369-378), this period brought an early fall of birds from the other side of the Atlantic. There were three Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidrit melanotos*) about the end of July and later a fourth was found, while the more or less simultaneous and equally early arrival of three Sabine's Gulls (*Xema sabini*) suggested that they too had come from the New World—northern Greenland or arctic Canada—rather than Spitsbergen or Siberia. The first two Pectorals were in the south-east, at Stoke (Kent) and Perry Oaks (Middlesex) on 24th-25th and 29th-30th July respectively, the descriptions suggesting different individuals. Next, soon afterwards, one was found on the Dee estuary at Shotton Pools (Flint): it remained from 31st July or 1st August until at least the 13th and was seen by many people. Finally, what was considered to be a more boldly marked and therefore different bird was observed two miles away on the Cheshire side of the Dee on 17th August. The Sabine's Gulls were at Teesmouth (Co. Durham) on 24th July and 1st-2nd August and at Cley (Norfolk) on the 3rd. (In late August more Pectorals and Sabine's Gulls appeared; these will be detailed next month.)

### OTHER RARE SPECIES

Among the other rarities of the period were waders, terns, gulls, birds of prey, a goose and a pelican of as yet uncertain origin, and several Passerines, mainly warblers. A Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), thought to be a second-year bird, was located on Porlock Marshes (Somerset) on 23rd July and was still there in early August; from 3rd to at least 25th August another immature stayed at Wareham sewage-farm (Dorset). An adult Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) at Benacre (Suffolk) on 21st July is supported by full details, but not so the only report

of a White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) and we must confine ourselves to mentioning that we have received an unconfirmed observation of one in the south-east. Several Mediterranean Black-headed Gulls (*Larus melanocephalus*) have included an adult moulting from summer plumage at Selsey Bill (Sussex) on 30th July and what was almost certainly the same individual at the same place on 6th and 7th August; an adult in full summer plumage at Langstone Harbour (Hampshire) on 31st July; a "near adult" at Portland Bill (Dorset) on 21st August; and single adults at Hartlepool (Co. Durham) and the Naze (Essex) from 6th and 20th August onwards; respectively. The last two individuals have now appeared in five consecutive autumns (e.g. *Brit. Birds*, 53: 166). A Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) was seen by a large number of observers at Shotton Pools (Flint) during the week following the 6th. There were two or three reports of Kites (*Milvus milvus*) outside Wales—single birds at Adhurst St. Mary, near Petersfield (Hampshire), on 14th July and at Ainsdale Dunes, near Southport (Lancashire), on 21st August, and a second-hand observation of two at Darlington (Yorkshire) at the end of July. On the other hand, the only Ospreys (*Pandion haliaëtus*) reported away from the Scottish breeding area during the period under review were at Teesmouth (Co. Durham) on 24th July, over the River Camel (Cornwall) on 11th and 12th August and at the mouth of the River Ythan (Aberdeenshire) on the 15th.

A Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) which was found at Encombe, near Corfe Castle (Dorset), on 17th August, and which was still present four days later associating with a flock of Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*), was a most extraordinary occurrence. All the 15 accepted records of this species in Britain have been between October and March, and so one is tempted to dismiss this one as an escape without further ado. It was, however, described as very wild, taking flight if approached to within 200 yards. Enquiries remain to be made and the same applies in connection with the interesting observations of a pelican (*Pelecanus* sp.) at Witton-le-Wear, near Bishop Auckland (Co. Durham), for much of July up to the 30th and at the Isle of May (Fife) on 9th August. The descriptions tally reasonably well and it seems probable that the same individual was involved. The Durham bird was identified as an immature Pink-backed Pelican (*P. rufescens*), an African species which is hardly likely to reach this country in a wild state. Other birds of more or less suspect origin seen during the period included a female Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*) at Locko Park, Spondon, near Derby, from 23rd July to at least 25th August, and a male Red-headed Bunting (*Emberiza bruniceps*) at Gillingham (Kent) on 21st August.

But the rarer Passerines have mainly been species which the systematic trapping of recent years has shown to be annual wanderers. Two Woodchat Shrikes (*Lanius senator*) were ringed at St. Agnes (Isles of Scilly) during August, and an Icterine Warbler (*Hippolais icterina*) which was found at Blakeney Point (Norfolk) on the 6th was trapped on the 7th and last seen on the 8th. While the Icterines appear on the east coast, we expect the Melodious Warblers (*Hippolais polyglotta*) in the Irish Sea area and one was caught at Bardsey Island (Caernarvonshire) on the 17th; there has been at least one there every year since 1954 and the total ringed at the observatory is now ten. The first Barred Warbler (*Sylvia nisoria*) to be reported this autumn was caught at Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire) on 21st August. A Bonelli's Warbler (*Phylloscopus bonelli*) claimed at Fareham (Hampshire) on 27th and 28th July was not trapped, however.

### FURTHER INTERESTING FEATURES OF EARLY AUTUMN

Not many Hoopoes (*Upupa epops*) were seen during the period, in contrast to the good numbers during May-June (*Brit. Birds*, 53: 318-319, 368). Occurrences near Ashford (Kent), at Dungeness (Kent) and near Ystrad Ffin (Carmarthenshire), on 28th, 30th and 30th respectively, suggest that the first ones of the autumn started to

go through at about the end of July, when there was also the first real sign of Passerines on the move. Since then, however, the only reports have been from south coast counties. Incidentally, we learn that a Hoopoe spent much of May, June and July on Dowrog Common, near St. David's (Pembrokeshire).

Records of Avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) included one at Steart Point (Somerset) on 24th and 28th July and 14th August. On the first two dates a Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) was also present and it or another was seen on the River Parrett at West Huntspill (Somerset) on 2nd August. The only other Spoonbill reported away from the east coast during the period was at Langstone Harbour (Hampshire) from 3rd to 14th July. Among the numerous records of Little Gulls (*L. minutus*) we might mention a juvenile which stayed on the Dee estuary at Shotton Pools (Flint) for several days from 6th August and was joined by an adult on the 11th, the latter remaining until the 17th at least: the species is unusual in the north-west. Inland observations of Common Scoters (*Melanitta nigra*) at Pitsford Reservoir (Northamptonshire) and Holme Pierrepont (Nottinghamshire) on 6th August (the latter still present on the 7th) may perhaps have been connected. On the 16th Pitsford Reservoir also produced a Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), an unusual visitor to the Midlands.

Last month (p. 368) we referred to the early start to the wader passage and we thought then that it might be a fairly good year for the northern marsh-nesting species. This seems to have been borne out during August. From an as yet inadequate amount of information it appears that Wood Sandpipers (*Tringa glareola*) have been passing through in good numbers and that Little Stints (*Calidris minuta*), Curlew Sandpipers (*C. testacea*) and Spotted Redshanks (*T. erythropus*) are well represented. The last week of July, and the 3rd-10th, the 12th-15th and the beginning of the fourth week of August stand out as times of passage. Wood Sandpipers on the Dee estuary (Flint/Cheshire) rose to as many as nine on the 10th-11th after six on the 6th, an unusual number for the north-west. At the same time one Wood Sandpiper got as far as Cape Clear Island (Co. Cork) on 6th August and remained for several days; this was the first record for the county and the species is scarce in Ireland generally (though not as rare as was formerly thought to be the case). In our previous summary we referred to the occurrence of one or two single Little Stints in the early passage at the end of June, but we now learn that no less than three together were seen at Hickling Broad (Norfolk) on the 26th.

Throughout the period (particularly during the fortnight around the turn of the month) Black Terns (*Chilidonias niger*) were reported in small numbers from many parts of the country as far north as Shropshire, Nottingham, Yorkshire and Co. Durham, but there was no suggestion of any large-scale movement until the last five days of August when many were seen in the east and south of England As there appear to be very few records of this species for Inner London, however, we might perhaps mention the occurrence of one in summer plumage at Westminster Bridge on 29th July.

### OUT-OF-SEASON BIRDS AND COLLARED DOVES

We have only recently learnt that a pair of Little Bitterns (*Ixobrychus minutus*) appeared at a locality in Huntingdonshire on 26th June. The two birds were observed regularly for the next ten or fourteen days, after which the male alone was in evidence until 19th July. No more was then seen of either.

Last month (p. 367) we mentioned summering by Little Gulls in Scotland and so it is not out of place to include reference to an immature which stayed at Farlington Marshes (Hampshire) from the beginning of May to at least 6th August. Iceland Gulls (*L. glaucoides*) in summer are no longer as remarkable as they once seemed, particularly since an immature took up more or less permanent residence in the area of Southwick and Shoreham (Sussex) from January 1958 (*Sussex Bird Reports* 1958 and 1959; *Brit. Birds*, 51: 132, 207, 251, 282, 444 and 530; 52: 68 and 440);

however, we should mention a second-year bird which has been seen at intervals since late March on the Dee estuary (Flint/Cheshire border) and which was still present on 6th August. Three Shags (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) spent the summer at King George VI Reservoir (Middlesex), an unusual inland record (see also *Brit. Birds*, 53: 280 and 320). Even more curious are two records of Black-throated Divers (*Gavia arctica*) summering on English reservoirs, at Cannock (Staffordshire) and Hanningfield (Essex); the former was described as an immature bird, the latter as an adult in winter plumage. An immature Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) near Durham on 5th August was another winter visitor at an unusual date; what was presumably the same bird was then seen at Hurworth Burn Reservoir from the 10th to the 13th. Finally, a Redwing (*Turdus musicus*) spent the summer at Beddington sewage-farm (Surrey), being seen from May to July; it may be recalled that in 1959 a Fieldfare (*T. pilaris*) did likewise.

Reports of Collared Doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*) continue to come in. Among the most interesting of those recently received are two from different localities in Cheshire, the first of a single bird in June and July and the second of two birds from 20th July into August.

### LATE NESTING OF THRUSHES

From counties in central England—Oxford, Warwick, Nottingham, Lincoln, Suffolk, Bedford, Hertford, Buckingham and Surrey—come reports of late nests of Song Thrushes (*Turdus philomelos*) and Blackbirds (*T. merula*) with eggs in August, by which time these two species have usually finished nesting. We hope that any other records will be sent to H. Mayer-Cross, B.T.O., 2 King Edward Street, Oxford.

# Requests for information

## Committee on toxic chemicals

A Joint Committee of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the British Trust for Ornithology has now been formed, under the Chairmanship of Stanley Cramp, to study the effects of toxic chemicals on birds. The Committee is anxious to obtain any evidence of birds being killed by agricultural chemicals used in sprays or seed dressings. The basic information needed is the date and locality of each kill, the species and number of birds affected, and the chemical used. The Committee would, however, appreciate prompt notification of any birds whose deaths are thought to be due to such chemicals so that, if necessary, corpses may be collected for analysis. All information should be sent to the Secretary of the Committee who is P. J. Conder, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 25 Eccleston Square, London, S.W.1.

## Whooper Swan enquiry 1960-61

The British Trust for Ornithology and the Wildfowl Trust have agreed jointly to conduct an enquiry on the Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) this coming winter. The purpose of the enquiry is to ascertain (a) status and distribution, (b) proportion of young in wintering herds, (c) dates of arrival and departure, and (d) general feeding habits in relation to agricultural crops. To supplement the regular Wildfowl Counts, observers are asked to make counts of Whooper Swans as frequently as possible and in as many areas as possible. Careful observations of feeding habits are particularly wanted, especially in the spring. The organiser is Miss Betty Garden, Eider Cottage, Newburgh, Aberdeenshire, from whom copies of a questionnaire may be obtained.

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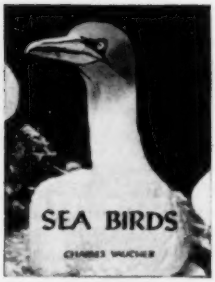


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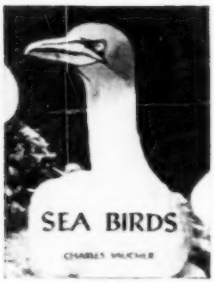


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